

Category 4 -- Professionalism

In conjunction with responding to calls for public safety services, the dispatcher must demonstrate professionalism in every aspect of performance of these services. The dispatcher faces challenges every day that require knowledge, judgment, skill, and ability from multiple and varied sources. To meet those challenges successfully, the dispatcher must attain and maintain professionalism in the performance of all duties. Expected performance outcomes include the following:

- 4.1 Respond to stressful situations professionally.
- 4.2 Respond to abusive callers or difficult people professionally.

Performance Outcome 4.1

Respond to stressful situations professionally.

Training Objective 4.1

Given a written or practical exercise, identify or demonstrate the necessary skills and techniques to respond to stressful situations professionally.

Criteria for Testing: The trainee shall be tested on the following:

- 4.1.1. Define crisis, victim, and stress.
- 4.1.2. Identify two aspects of victimization.
- 4.1.3. Identify three stages of stress reactions.
- 4.1.4. Identify common characteristics of stress.
- 4.1.5. Identify methods of handling stress.
- 4.1.6. Define Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and its use in communication centers.
- 4.1.7. Identify techniques that allow dispatchers to maintain control of situations.
- 4.1.8. Identify intervention techniques used to assist victims over the phone.

Lesson Plan Guide: The lesson plan shall include the following at a minimum:

1. Define crisis, victim, and stress.
 - a. Crisis – a crisis is a decisive or crucial time, stage or event that represents a turning point in the course of anything.
 - b. Victim – a person who is harmed by or suffers a loss through some act, condition, or circumstance.
 - c. Stress is the body’s non-specific response to any demand placed on it. (Hans Seyle, M.D.)

Each individual should learn as much as possible about their individual reactions to stress as this will provide the basis for enhancing their ability to manage their stress. What are some non-specific responses that your body gives in reaction to demands you place on it?

2. Identify two aspects of victimization.
 - a. Perception of the victim – it is very important for dispatchers to be constantly mindful that a distressed person making a 911 call has a different perception of the situation they are describing to you than you may have. Even when you are responding in a way to help calm the person, it is important that you do not minimize the situation about which they are calling. Be sure the victim understands what you said in the way that you mean it.
 - b. System responses – it is important to give victims fair and accurate information when they call. 911 is often the first contact they will have in asking for help and your response is important in helping them to deal with their crisis. In the past, victims have often felt “revictimized” by a system that focuses more on the perpetrator than the victim. This has changed to a certain extent, and more effort is being made in this area.

Victims need immediate help when they call 911, but also need information when a case proceeds to trial. Know where to refer victims if they call you for this information. Understand the loss they have experienced and the trauma they must endure to convict a perpetrator. Generally, one in five calls involves a crisis situation, so the more you know about the workings of the criminal justice system, the more you will be able to assist victims.

3. Coping with crisis
 - a. Five general coping behaviors
 1. Cognitive strategies (thinking ahead, or pre-planning how you would act if faced with a certain situation)
 2. Verbal strategies (talking your way out of a situation)
 3. Physical strategies (fight or flight)
 4. Psychological defense (fight or flight)
 5. Physiological reaction (numerous possibilities – crying, red face, clenched teeth or fists, etc.)
 - b. Six observable coping strategies exhibited by victims
 1. High anxiety (emotional state at crisis impact)
 2. Denial (can't believe it's happening)
 3. Anger (upset because they did not deserve this)
 4. Remorse (feeling of guilt. . .could have possibly prevented it "if only I had not. . .")
 5. Grief (abject sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness felt by victim)
 6. Reconciliation – After working through grief the desire to "put it behind" and go on with life.
 - c. Dispatchers and first response units will often encounter the three or four phases or a mix of them. Investigators, public defenders, victim/witness counselors and others will usually encounter the victim in some combination of the last three. However, there is no fixed time frame for these behaviors, and some victims will move back to earlier strategies before moving forward.
4. Identify three stages of stress reactions.
 - a. The alarm stage. This occurs when the body reacts to the stressor with a physical reaction. These include the following:
 - 1). Increased breathing rate
 - 2). Increased heart rate
 - 3). Increased metabolism rate
 - 4). Increased oxygen in the blood
 - 5). Increased sugar in the blood
 - 6). Increased serum lipids
 - 7). Increased serum cholesterol
 - 8). Increased blood flow to the muscles
 - 9). Increased clotting mechanism of the blood
 - 10). Decreased digestion
 - 11). Decreased inflammatory response
 - 12). Decreased immune response

- b. The resistance stage. This occurs after the stressor is gone and the body works to repair the damage caused by stress.
 - c. The exhaustion stage. This occurs when stressors are prolonged and the body remains in an alarm stage condition with no time to repair itself exhaustion sets in.
 - d. The purpose and use of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams. (Contact the regional office of Emergency Medical Services to find a local team; call the state office for phone numbers if necessary. Local mental health may be a part of the team or if not, able to help, also.)
5. Identify common characteristics of stress.
6. Identify methods of handling stress.
- a. Physical activity helps to manage stress. Keeping your body in good shape as a general rule gives you confidence in your physical skills and assists with mental alertness. Simple exercises to relieve muscles that may tense up from working long periods in certain positions are also helpful. Shoulder rolls, head rolls, standing, stretching, arm circles, etc., can be done periodically throughout the day to help provide some physical relief. This, in turn, helps to manage stress.
 - b. Communicate with co-workers or loved ones about the stress of a work day. Just be sure not to break confidentiality of information when doing so. Giving and receiving support through sharing stressful feelings helps in managing stress.
 - c. Recognize limits. If a situation at work is beyond your control and cannot be changed, learn to accept this.
 - d. Take care of yourself. Eat and sleep properly. Good nutrition and proper rest are important factors for everyone in managing stress. Lack of proper nutrition affects mental capability. Lack of proper rest may quickly make a person less tolerant of situations that otherwise would be manageable.
 - e. Have fun. Time for things you enjoy doing is important for relaxation and helping to keep a balanced outlook. Without this, you may react much more negatively to calls for service than is appropriate.
 - f. Breathe. Taking slow, deep breaths periodically can both help you relax and help keep you calm in a crisis situation. Use this breathing technique to aid your mental focus.
 - g. Cry. When a situation has deeply affected you, tears provide a good release for anxiety. When you have shed these, you will be better able to cope.

- h. Use mental imagery. You can create a special, quiet place in your mind that will help you manage stress. You can go there even when you are working and use that imagery to help you get through a difficult caller or situation.
 - i. Avoid self-medication. Avoid drugs in general, but if you are taking any prescription drugs, follow the directions and do not take extras. Drugs, even non-prescription ones, can be habit forming and create more stress than they relieve.
 - j. Be positive. Focus on the good things about the world, life, and people. Negative thinking may result in negative talking and negative feelings that simply are not healthy for you, your co-workers, and your workplace. When there are differences, work in a proactive manner to resolve these.
 - k. Use positive self-talk. Think good thoughts about yourself. Give yourself a pat on the back when you've done something good. Positive thinking is one of the best tools you can use that will ultimately help you manage stress productively.
7. Identify techniques that allow dispatchers to maintain control of situations.
- a. Direct the conversation to elicit essential information.
 - b. Be courteous but assertive in focusing the caller to provide the information you need to send the correct response.
 - c. Stay on the subject but do not intimidate the caller.
 - d. Ask the caller not to hang up until instructed to do so.
8. Identify intervention techniques used to assist victims over the phone.
- a. Answer all calls professionally regardless of the information that the caller is telling you. Do not appear to disbelieve what a caller is telling you – this sets a bad tone with victims and may affect the case. The reality is simply that you have no way of knowing the facts of any call, so always treat every caller with courtesy, respect, and the appropriate professional response.

- b. As one of the initial responders, the dispatcher may help relieve the guilt and anxiety of the victim that the victim may have experienced as part of the trauma. Be empathetic and validating of the actions the victim took during the trauma.
- c. There are seven general goals that dispatchers try to meet while assisting victims over the phone:
 - 1). Help the victim regain control. The person may be in shock and you need to help him or her be able to help himself or herself until emergency response units arrive.
 - 2). Help the victim understand the situation in which he/she is involved. If the situation relates to a crime (such as rape), or an accident with injuries/fatalities, the victim needs to know the steps to take that will help him or her as well as assist the criminal justice process.
 - 3). Get the victim to speak freely and frankly. This can only happen if the dispatcher is empathetic and supportive to the victim. If the victim is reluctant, then don't push too hard. The officer will get additional background information.
 - 4). Obtain standard information needed to generate an emergency response while this is happening. You may need to interface supportive remarks such as "You're doing fine, please keep helping me so I can get help to you," or other such phrases as you get the basics.
 - 5). Help the victim focus on what is important in the PRESENT situation. After a trauma, particularly a crime, some victims start worrying about what other people will think (spouses, family, friends, etc.) instead of focusing on what needs to be done now.
 - 6). Assist the victim with alternatives that will help resolve problems.
 - 7). Assist the victim in mobilizing resources. You may contact a relative, friend, or other person for the victim or refer him or her to appropriate victim services.
- d. Effective intervention has five components.

- 1). Assessment – the dispatcher determines what immediate help is needed and identifies the crisis requests of the victim.
- 2). Plan of action – determine what needs to be done to accommodate the victim’s crisis requests and formulate possible ways to do this. Crisis requests often include the following:
 - a). Police intervention – victims see police as “official” and expect their help.
 - b). Medical intervention – if injured, treatment is first on the minds of victims. Assurance that injury is not permanent is most desired.
 - c). Psychological intervention – victim wants to talk about feelings (ventilate and validate).
 - d). Control/support – victim needs to make minor decisions to begin regaining control and will often want family or friend contacted for support.
 - e). Uncertainty – victim may be unsure what his/her needs are and wants information.
- 3). Implementation – take immediate action based upon the plan.
- 4). Effect – positive or negative? If negative, reevaluate and try a different strategy.
- 5). Recap – explain to victim what has happened, what will be done now, what will happen next.

Performance Outcome 4.2

Respond to abusive callers or difficult people professionally.

Training Objective 4.2

Given a written and practical exercise, identify and demonstrate the steps that assist with handling abusive callers or difficult people.

Criteria for Testing: The trainee shall be tested on the following:

- 4.2.1 Identify the five steps that assist in handling abusive callers or difficult people.
- 4.2.2 Demonstrate handling an abusive caller in a practical scenario.

Lesson Plan Guide: The lesson plan guide shall include the following at a minimum:

1. Helpful background to deal with abusive callers or difficult people.
 - a. Awareness of five common characteristics of difficult people.
 - 1). A predictable, abrasive style of behavior
 - 2). Experienced as difficult by most people
 - 3). Blame others, not themselves
 - 4). Rob you of time and energy
 - 5). Behavior is often out of proportion to the problem
 - b. Four pitfalls to avoid in handling difficult people.
 - 1). Do not excuse their behavior.
 - 2). Do not ignore their behavior.
 - 3). Do not try to change their personalities.
 - 4). Do not collude with their behavior (do not fight, run away, or play games).
2. Five positive steps to use in dealing with abusive callers or difficult people.
 - 1). Stand up or project verbally.
 - 2). Talk straight – words, tone, and behavior must be consistent. State what you need and what are the consequences if they do not respond.
 - 3). Listen attentively but set time limits as needed.
 - 4). Avoid “triangling,” e.g., bringing in third parties.
 - 5). Move to problem solving as quickly as possible.
3. Use positive problem solving steps.
 - 1). Identify the emotional climate.
 - 2). Identify the problem.
 - 3). Stay on the problem.
 - 4). Do not engage in “blaming” when you are problem solving.
 - 5). Do not “put down” the other person.
 - 6). Identify alternatives that may help resolve the problem.
 - 7). Evaluate the alternatives.
 - 8). Select the alternative that is fairest to all parties involved.
 - 9). Be clear about the procedure to be followed to implement the solution.
 - 10). Evaluate the success of the solution.